

Provocateur

On the Record: Two NYC Traffic Bosses on What NYC Needs Now

IN THE 1980'S BOTH "GRIDLOCK" Sam Schwartz and Lucius (Lou) Riccio served terms as Commissioner of the NYC Department of Transportation. Mr. Schwartz was interviewed recently for the upcoming T.A. produced documentary film, *Contested Streets: Breaking NYC Gridlock* (contestedstreets.com). Dr. Riccio was interviewed for an upcoming short film by the Open Planning Project (openplans.org). Below are excerpts from the interviews.

SCHWARTZ

Bicycling:

I'm a little worried that NYC is not seeing the bike for all it is worth. [The City of New York] really doesn't take it as a serious mode of transportation. We have not done enough to make biking safe here in New York City. There are some measures that are being taken—the parks are doing better, for example. Central Park and Prospect Park have bike lanes but even there we allow cars in at certain hours of the day, and the bike lane gets overwhelmed.

Congestion Pricing:

I'm so jealous of London because I wanted New York to be the first city in the Western Hemisphere to introduce congestion pricing. And in fact, after the transit strike in 1980, we passed a [congestion pricing] law and were sued by the garage board of trade and the auto club of New York. We lost. In 1986-87 Mayor Koch was willing to float it again and we were nearly tarred and feathered.

Congestion pricing would absolutely work in New York City. It would benefit the well-to-do—they would get to work on time and benefit the people in the five boroughs [if] the revenue stays within the transit system.

[Mayor Bloomberg] is the kind of visionary who can make something like this happen. It doesn't look like we have convinced him yet. Business leaders have to get together and explain to the Mayor that he really should consider some more dramatic strategies when it comes to transportation, that we have to think of ourselves as a 21st century city. We want a city that is designed around the walker, not the car.

Pedestrian Streets:

We should begin looking at certain streets and turning them over to pedestrians and transit and only allowing deliveries in the early morning and night.



SAM SCHWARTZ COMPANY



CLARENCE ECKERSON JR.

Left: Sam Schwartz is President and CEO of the Sam Schwartz Company, a New York City based civil engineering, planning, and urban design firm. Right: Lucius Riccio is Vice President of Gedeon GRC Consulting, an engineering and planning consulting firm. Dr. Riccio also currently teaches at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

We find very few people are driving in [to the central business district] and spending money. There is this misconception that we have to bring the car right to our front door. Time and time again it has been shown that you can have vibrant areas if you let cars be at the periphery and rely on transit [and walking] to bring in the bulk of the people...

So many business people that I meet nowadays are really enlightened. They are talking in terms of...pedestrians. It used to be car, car, car, how can we get the cars into the garages and what people want are to be in these protected boxes. So many people are saying that is no longer the solution. The leaders in business are beginning to talk that way.

We have to really focus on walking as a major form of transportation. We have to retrain our engineers. We have to make room for the pedestrian.

We have to look to a London or a Paris or a Copenhagen to start thinking about how we are going to become less reliant on the auto and how to encourage pedestrians.

RICCIO

Pedestrian Streets:

How about the stretch of Broadway from Times Square to Herald Square? What if you shut it down [to traffic]? Or what if you made it just one lane for taxis and buses, and trucks doing deliveries?

Congestion Pricing:

The unfortunate reality is that there is a lot of misinformation...congestion pricing has been shown worldwide to be a positive thing!

Transit-oriented East River bridges:

The four East River Bridges were all built before the automobile. They were all built as mass transit bridges. When I was transportation commissioner I proposed that we return [all] the bridges to mass transit. And I ordered my engineers in the rebuilding of the bridges, make sure that they are rebuilt solidly enough so that if future generations want to put trains back on there they will have the capability to do that.

Transportation Planning:

New York has to really think about what kind of city it wants to be in 10, 20, 30 years and it can't do that unless it has a really solid and comprehensive plan for transportation.

I believe that transportation planning should be part of city planning, that the commissioner of transportation should be a commissioner on the city planning commission. I would strengthen City Planning so that they make all plans, and I would make the chairman of the City Planning Commission a deputy mayor, reporting directly to the mayor. All planners would be working on a beautiful city, making New York City the most livable, most economically viable city in the world. □